United Nations A/70/414

General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 October 2015

Original: English

Seventieth session
Agenda item 72 (b)
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches to improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/171 and provides an overview of the activities and achievements of the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region from August 2014 to July 2015. It also provides an outline of measures taken towards the implementation of the resolution in the context of increasing demand for support and expertise for the promotion of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa.

* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments.

15-12515 (E) 141015

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/171 on the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region, in which, among other things, the Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Assembly at its seventieth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. It provides an outline of progress achieved by the Centre through activities conducted from August 2014 to July 2015. Most of the Centre's activities for 2015 will be implemented during the third and fourth quarters of the year.

2. The Centre operates under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It was established by the General Assembly in resolution 60/153, in 2005, and is mandated to undertake training and documentation activities according to international human rights standards and to support such efforts within the region by Governments, United Nations agencies and programmes, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations. The main objective of the Centre is to strengthen human rights knowledge and skills within its region of operation.[1] The Centre is hosted by the Government of Qatar.

3. Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/162, regular budget funds have been allocated to reinforce the Centre's capacity to respond to training and documentation demands. The extrabudgetary funds allocated to the Centre (including the provision for two P-3 posts) have been reduced owing to the financial challenges that OHCHR has faced. The staffing capacity of the Centre has been reinforced in 2015 and currently consists of three Professional staff members (1 P-5, 1 P-4 and 1 P-3) and three support staff. All posts have now been filled.

4. The Centre has continued to conduct important work in accordance with its mandate, in particular under the global thematic priorities of OHCHR, as detailed in section II. In addition to regular training activities, the Centre has organized key regional forums and consultations on various thematic topics, including human rights and security, criminal justice reforms and the protection of minority rights.

5. The annexed table reflects a list of beneficiaries of activities conducted by the Centre up to 30 June 2015.

II. Main achievements of the Centre

6. The strategic priorities of the Centre are set in line with the six thematic priorities described in the OHCHR Office Management Plan for 2014-2017:

(a) Strengthening international human rights mechanisms;

(b) Enhancing equality and countering discrimination;

(c) Combating impunity and strengthening accountability and the rule of law;

[1] The Centre covers 25 countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

(d) Integrating human rights in development and the economic sphere;

(e) Widening the democratic space;

(f) Early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity.

7. The Centre plays an important capacity-building role for various actors, including Governments, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and United Nations entities. It has also been engaging with regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions.

8. Member States' requests for capacity-building have continued to significantly increase, especially in the following areas:

(a) Reporting to the United Nations treaty bodies and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review;

(b) Basic and advanced human rights training courses for diplomats, journalists, law enforcement officials and members of national human rights institutions;

(c) A human rights-based approach to combating trafficking in persons.

9. Member States have financially assisted the Centre in implementing activities hosted in their countries.

10. Since its establishment, and following regional consultations, the Centre has carried out regional programmes, which have also been adopted and implemented at the country level. From August 2014 to July 2015, the Centre carried out training programmes on the following themes:

(a) Human rights and security;

(b) Human rights and criminal justice reform in the Middle East and North Africa;

(c) Human rights and gender;

(d) Human rights education;

(e) Minority rights;

(f) Human rights and diplomacy;

(g) Human rights and the media;

(h) Combating trafficking in persons;

(i) Human rights mechanisms;

(j) Economic, social and cultural rights;

(k) Human rights defenders.

11. Having carried out the foregoing programmes for the past four years, the Centre has developed and forged a strong relationship with a network of former participants, some of whom have contributed to the delivery of the activities.

A. Human rights and security

12. On 5 and 6 November 2014, in Doha, OHCHR organized a conference on challenges to security and human rights in the Arab region, under the patronage of the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and the general secretariats of the League of Arab States and the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior. The event was attended by more than 300 representatives of international and Arab organizations working in the field of human rights, interior and justice ministries, human rights departments of ministries of foreign affairs and of security institutions, and study and research centres on security and human rights issues. The conference was aimed at highlighting the importance of striking a balance between ensuring respect for human rights amid threats to security. Participants adopted recommendations, including on the importance of respecting international human rights norms and standards while combating terrorism and stronger adherence to the principles of the rule of law, including non-discrimination and equality before the law, and encouraged stronger cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

13. The Centre organized several meetings with the Department of Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior of Qatar on combating impunity and strengthening accountability and the rule of law in Qatar. The Centre has analysed training materials for law enforcement agencies with the aim of designing a pilot project for the Qatari police academy.

B. Human rights and criminal justice reform in the Middle East and North Africa

14. On 3 and 4 November 2014, an international conference on recent trends in criminal justice reform and human rights was organized in Amman by Penal Reform International, in collaboration with the Centre and the Public Security Directorate/Correctional and Rehabilitation Centres Department of Jordan. The event brought together more than 200 participants, including human rights activists and experts, government officials, heads of correctional institutions and prisons, Islamic scholars, journalists and representatives of the United Nations, the European Commission, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the League of Arab States. The main objective of the meeting was to provide a platform for in-depth discussions between international experts and decision makers and policymakers on international and regional standards on the administration of justice, with a focus on the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) and the recent proposals for the revision of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The conference was also an opportunity to share good practices. The main recommendations included implementing after-care programmes aimed at ensuring the rehabilitation of prisoners; encouraging States to adopt alternatives to imprisonment, including non-custodial measures; strengthening the role of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in monitoring places of detention; and setting national priorities for reforms of criminal justice systems and harmonization of national laws with international human rights standards. The Centre's earlier training activity with Penal Reform

International (in 2013, on the role of national human rights institutions in relation to national strategies for combating torture) informed some of the discussions. The Centre will continue to work towards strengthening the capacity of national human rights institutions to monitor places of detention.

C. Human rights and gender

15. The Centre has mainstreamed gender equality in its policies, programmes and processes. It held several training workshops to highlight issues pertaining to women's rights and gender throughout the reporting period. The Centre has posted information relating to gender equality on its website to better assist beneficiaries. From 2015, the Centre has begun to dedicate at least two of its main thematic training activities to women's rights. It is also planning to hold a regional training activity for women human rights defenders in the last quarter of 2015.

16. From 11 to 13 May 2015, the Centre organized a regional training workshop in Jordan on the role of national human rights institutions in protecting women deprived from their liberty, in collaboration with Penal Reform International. In total, 26 participants from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen attended the training, including lawyers, researchers and technical staff members from national human rights institutions and civil society actors. They were introduced to the Bangkok Rules and received training on how to monitor places of detention, reporting mechanisms and follow-up visits. Important outcomes included commitments to conducting gender-sensitive monitoring for women in prisons, including migrant women, and to promoting the protection of women deprived of their liberty.

D. Human rights education

17. From 31 August to 2 September 2014, the Centre organized a workshop on quality assurance of human rights education programmes, hosting participants specialized in curriculum design and teacher training from Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Representatives of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also attended. The workshop covered human rights education and United Nations initiatives to promote the full enjoyment of the right to education amid challenges in the Middle East and North Africa.

18. On 11 January 2015, the Centre, in partnership with Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, called for expressions of interest to undertake projects on the protection of the right to education in times of insecurity and armed conflict in the region. Three non-governmental organizations have been identified as eligible to receive grants and implement small-scale and medium-scale projects in Iraq and the State of Palestine, with a particular focus on refugees, displaced persons and children.

E. Minority rights

19. On 2 and 3 December 2014, the Centre organized a regional training programme and consultation on minority rights in the Middle East and North Africa, held in Tunis. The activity was aimed at enabling the participants to effectively use United Nations mechanisms for the protection of the rights of minorities. It was attended by more than 50 participants from 20 countries, including human rights defenders, religious groups, university law lecturers and representatives of ministries of foreign affairs. The key outcome was a commitment to increasing the number of initiatives and training activities to promote the protection of minority rights. This was the first in a series of annual activities (as currently planned by OHCHR) based on the guidance note of the Secretary-General on racial discrimination and protection of minorities and designed to strengthen the capacity of United Nations staff members to develop and implement activities aimed at the protection of minority rights, the role of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations in promoting and protecting minority rights and the publication of the main documents and tools in this field.

F. Human rights and diplomacy

20. Regional training on human rights and diplomacy has been a flagship activity of the Centre. It is organized in two phases, over two years, for the same participants. From 21 to 25 November 2014, the Centre organized its third annual training programme for Arab diplomats, in collaboration with the Shorouq Centre for Democracy, Media and Human Rights. The programme was initiated by the Centre in 2012 with the aim of enhancing the capacity of Arab diplomats to better engage with the United Nations human rights system. The programme hosted prominent human rights figures in the region, accommodating 21 participants, including 6 women. The second phase will be organized in September 2015. The activity has resulted in the creation of a strong network of former participants who have contributed as resource persons in subsequent training activities. Consequently, the Centre has also strengthened its partnership with the human rights departments and sections of the ministries of foreign affairs in the region.

G. Human rights and the media

21. From 11 to 15 May 2015, the Centre marked World Press Freedom Day, in partnership with national stakeholders in Morocco. A cultural and journalistic institution in Tangier, Bayt al-Sahafah, hosted the event. On 11 May, the partners organized a symposium focused on human rights education for journalists. The participants proposed recommendations to enhance the work of the media to promote and protect human rights. They were also introduced to the third phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2015-2019), which is focused on human rights and journalism. From 12 to 15 May, the event was focused mainly on expert-led discussions of the participants' journalistic work (written, audio and televisual) on trafficking, arrests and detention of journalists, arrests of juveniles and children, equality between women and men in obtaining access to education and the rights of women in the region. The same participants had been trained in 2014 on a human rights-based approach to media coverage and asked to use the

knowledge gained to produce journalistic work integrating that approach. The feedback received from the participants, who formed a social media network following the training in 2014, was very positive. They all indicated their determination to continue to employ their human rights training skills in their work. Another positive outcome was the emergence of experienced participants who could contribute as resource persons for the Centre in regular activities relating to media and human rights.

H. Combating trafficking in persons

22. The Centre continues to promote the OHCHR human rights-based approach to combating trafficking in persons, on the basis of the Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking and the Arab Initiative to Combat Human Trafficking. By the end of 2015, the Centre will have provided training activities covering the entire spectrum of the Recommended Principles. The Centre continues to receive requests for copies of the Arabic version of the Recommended Principles because its partners use them in their own training activities.

23. From 21 to 23 October 2014, the Centre and the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children organized a regional training session on international cooperation and the right to effective remedy for victims of trafficking, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Its purpose was to strengthen knowledge and skills with regard to combating trafficking in persons in accordance with the international standards for victims. The proceedings and feedback showed that most of the participants would benefit from additional training on the topic. The training included discussions on the definition of trafficking, the roles and responsibilities of officials and decision makers and the rights of victims. In addition, participants expressed interest in learning from the experiences of others and in being exposed to more practical activities on combating trafficking, protecting victims and engaging in international cooperation.

I. Human rights mechanisms

24. From 26 to 28 August 2014, the Centre organized a regional training workshop on best practice in following up on the recommendations of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, aimed at identifying best practice in the region and challenges. It was attended by some 25 participants from nine countries that were considered by the Working Group from 2012 to 2014: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The event was organized in collaboration with the Arab Organization for Human Rights, which provided logistical support. Five of its members also attended.

25. From 20 to 26 September 2014, the Centre supported the OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East in carrying out a training course on the universal periodic review process. Two workshops held in Oman targeted, among others, staff members of the National Human Rights Commission of Oman and civil society organizations in that country and were focused on the role of national human rights institutions.

26. In 2014, the Centre launched an annual publication (available online and in hard copy) compiling the general comments of the human rights treaty bodies. The first edition, in 2014, was dedicated to the general comments of the Human Rights Committee. The second, completed in June 2015, is dedicated to the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. The third, to be published in 2016, will be dedicated to the Committee against Torture.

J. Economic, social and cultural rights

27. From 8 to 11 December 2014, the Centre organized the first phase of its train-the-trainers programme on economic, social and cultural rights, which was focused on providing participants with a better understanding of those rights and on monitoring them. The training was attended by 15 participants, including 6 women, from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. As a positive outcome of the training, a female judge from Libya prepared an analytical study on economic, social and cultural rights for the proposed draft of the Libyan constitution and submitted it to the Libyan Constitutional Assembly.

28. The second phase of the programme is scheduled to be held in October 2015 in Algeria, in cooperation with the National Advisory Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and will be focused on enhancing the skills of the participants in documenting cases of violations of economic, social and cultural rights and in developing an advocacy strategy as part of international human rights mechanisms.

K. Human rights defenders

29. On 26 and 27 January 2015, the Centre held a regional forum on an enabling and secure environment for human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa, held in Tunis. It was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo and attended by 59 participants, including defenders and journalists. It was divided into three parts: international legal standards for the protection of defenders; trends of repression against defenders in the region; and how to enhance accountability and provide a safe and enabling environment for defenders. The participants adopted key recommendations, including the creation by the participants of an advocacy and solidarity network of defenders in the region and the further strengthening of the capacity of defenders in relation to monitoring and documenting human rights violations. On the basis of the latter, the Centre will concentrate on developing its training programmes in that field, with the 2015 edition to be focused on strengthening the capacity of women defenders in the region.

L. Other thematic activities

30. From 23 to 25 September 2014, the Centre organized a regional training workshop on the role of national human rights institutions in protecting the rights of persons deprived of their liberty, in cooperation with Penal Reform International. The aim of the workshop, held in Amman, was to strengthen the skills of those

institutions in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of international human rights mechanisms in relation to the rights of persons deprived of their liberty. The workshop was attended by 20 participants from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. They made several recommendations, including enhancing the skills of national human rights institutions in conducting gender-sensitive monitoring of places of detention for women and strengthening knowledge of the Bangkok Rules. On that basis, the Centre organized a training workshop focusing on women in detention (see para. 16 above).

31. On 11 and 12 November 2014, in Doha, the Centre held a training workshop on business and human rights and migration, in cooperation with the Department of Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was focused on the duties and responsibilities of the State and corporations, the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework and access to remedies. Participants discussed the international human, migration and labour rights framework and the human rights challenges faced by migrants in Qatar. The workshop was attended by representatives of the Government, national human rights institutions, private businesses and foundations.

32. On 14 April 2015, as part of the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Qatar, the Centre held a panel discussion on the theme "Moving away from the death penalty: the death penalty and drug-related offences", in cooperation with the OHCHR New York Office. Its objective was:

(a) To examine the human rights dimensions of the application of the death penalty in cases of drug-related offences;

(b) To share experiences from regions in which States invoke the death penalty when confronted with public concerns over drug trafficking and public safety;

(c) To discuss crime prevention strategies so as to reduce fear of crime, including human rights education regarding long-term solutions that could more effectively tackle crime and its root causes;

(d) To maintain and build momentum on the issue in preparation for the resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty, to be adopted by the General Assembly in 2016.

33. The Centre translated the OHCHR publication *Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Arguments, Trends and Perspectives* into Arabic and launched it during the panel discussion. The discussion, which was very well attended, resulted in strengthened knowledge about the death penalty in the region.

III. Conclusion

34. **The developments in the region have generated great demand for capacity-building and documentation on the promotion of human rights. With increased resources, the Centre has been empowered to fulfil its training and documentation mandate and to better meet the demands that it has been facing,**

in particular for the development of tailored training material. It has thus been able to reach a larger array of beneficiaries.

35. **Through regional consultations with Governments, national human rights institutions, academics, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, the Centre has provided a platform for discussion and to exchange experience and expertise on a wide range of issues, including the protection of the right to education during conflict and of the rights of minorities.**

36. **The continued support of the General Assembly has been instrumental in allowing the Centre to continue to discharge its mandate and contribute effectively to strengthening regional and national capacity relating to human rights.**

37. **During the reporting period, the Centre continued to provide needed support to Governments, national human rights institutions, regional organizations and civil society actors, as well as United Nations entities, with a view to improving the promotion and protection of human rights at the regional and national levels. The Centre will maintain its direct, sustainable and effective assistance and cooperation with regional and national counterparts, in particular amid increasing demand for capacity-building and technical cooperation. In addition to strengthening current activities, the Centre will increase its focus on strengthening its documentation mandate.**

Annex

Geographical representation at training courses and consultations conducted by the Centre[a]

	Number of times that key consultations and training courses were conducted in the country			*Number of times that countries nationalities were represented at key consultations and training courses*		
	2013	*2014*	*2015[b]*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015[b]*
Afghanistan	–	–	–	–	–	–
Algeria	–	–	–	2	7	1
Bahrain	–	–	–	–	5	2
Comoros	–	–	–	–	–	–
Djibouti	–	–	–	1	–	–
Egypt	–	1	1	4	10	3
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Iraq	–	–	–	2	6	2
Jordan	–	3	1	3	151	5
Kuwait	1	2	–	2	5	1
Lebanon	–	1	–	–	10	2
Libya	–	–	–	2	4	3
Mauritania	–	–	–	2	3	–
Morocco	–	2	1	–	24	13
Oman	–	1	–	2	2	2
Pakistan	–	–	–	–	–	–
Qatar	2	5	–	3	18	–
Saudi Arabia	–	2	1	3	172	43
Somalia	–	–	–	1	–	–
State of Palestine	–	–	–	4	20	4
Sudan	–	1	–	3	6	4
Syrian Arab Republic	–	–	–	–	2	3
Tunisia	–	1	1	2	9	10
United Arab Emirates	–	1	–	2	1	–
Yemen	3	1	–	5	16	2
Total	**6**	**21**	**5**	**43**	**471**	**100**

Note: Participants include, but are not limited to, government officials, law enforcement personnel and representatives of national human rights institutions and civil society actors, including journalists. The table does not reflect the representation of regional organizations.

[a] These are key training courses and consultations and should not be taken as an exhaustive representation of activities.

[b] Reflects the reporting period (until 30 June 2015). Given that most of the Centre's activities for 2015 will be implemented during the remainder of the year, the total number of participants for 2015 will increase significantly.